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53
SEP

DIGITAL
EDITION

SPAWN



CARILLA
McFARLANE
BRIAN

image® COMICS PRESENTS:

'THE RECKONING'



story

TODD McFARLANE

pencils

GREG CAPULLO

inks

TODD McFARLANE

DANNY MIKI

copy editor & letters

TOM ORZECOWSKI

color

BRIAN HABERLIN

DAN KEMP

Dedicated to:
Michele Capullo

Spawn #52 Summary:

Unbeknownst to either of her parents, the shoelace that lies with Cyan in her bed attached to her soother, is the only physical clue to Terry's mysterious recovery from cancer. Meanwhile, Terry's nightmares continue to reflect Al's experiences and he can't risk sharing his fears with Wanda. In another dimension, Spawn enters Hell's fifth level where he is revered by the masses as a returning king and savior. Although he denies his status, he is forced into a confrontation with the Savage Dragon and they battle for the position of the Messiah. Spawn defeats the Savage Dragon and then draws the wrath of his worshippers by freeing him from their stoning. The dwellers of Hell turn on both of them and stone them to death... or do they?

FOR IMAGE COMICS
LARRY MARDER - Executive Director

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Director Of Creative Development: TERRY FITZGERALD

Graphics Coordinator: JULIA SIMMONS Editorial Coordinator: MELANIE SIMMONS

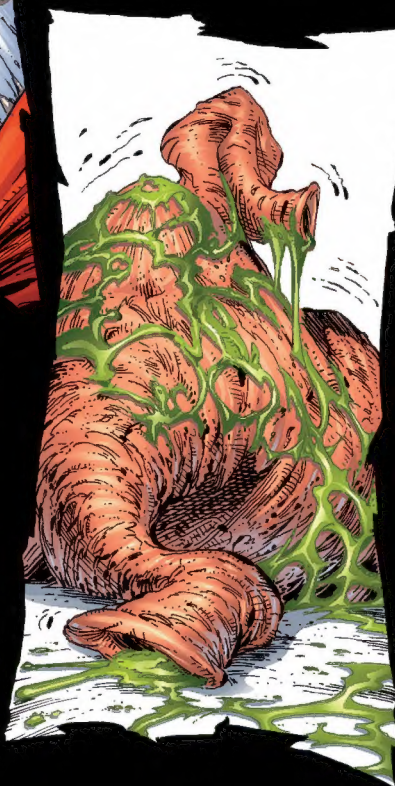
CHECK OUT THE SPAWN WEB SITE AT... <http://www.spawn.com>



The ABYSS. A HARSH BLACKNESS SO DENSE NO LIGHT HAS EVER INTRUDED HERE. WHILE GOD WAS CREATING THE COSMOS, GIVING LIFE TO EVERY CORNER, HIS OMNISCIENT PRESENCE CAST A **SHADOW**. PLANTED THERE AS WELL WAS A SEED. IT GREW STEADILY IN THE COLD PALL OF THE ALMIGHTY.

THIS PATCH OF INFINITY, JUST TO THE LEFT OF THE PRECIOUS LIGHT, IS NOW A **HARVEST GROUND** FOR THE DIVINELY THWARTED SEED.

SEED WE NOW CALL SIN.



IT GERMINATES IN MEN OF WEAKNESS. LUST, GREED, AND THE OTHER DEADLY SINS TAKE ROOT IN THEM.

EMBEDDED NOW IN THIS DARK LOAM, IS A MAN CONDEMNED BY HIS OWN ACTS UPON HUMANITY:

Lt. COLONEL AL SIMMONS.





HE'S BEEN HERE
BEFORE. HIS CONSCIOUS
MIND DOES NOT RECOG-
NIZE THE PLACE.

HIS
SENSES
DO.

IT HAPPENED IN A
BLINK THE FIRST
TIME... A SPLIT
SECOND BETWEEN
LIFE, DEATH AND
UNDEATH.

RIGHT NOW, HE'S
ONLY DISTANTLY
AWARE OF THE
STENCH OF
MURDER...

... THE PIQUANT
TASTE OF
CHARRED FLESH...

... THE HOLLOW
SOUND OF AN
AGONIZED CRY.



IT'S ALL SO
FAMILIAR.

WHERE
HE WAS
CURSED.

THIS IS
WHERE
HE DIED.

IN EXCHANGE
FOR THAT UNHOLY
BLESSING HE PAID
THE ULTIMATE
PRICE: HE
RELENGUISHED
HIS SHARE OF
ETERNITY.

HE IS
RETURNED
NOW TO HIS
DEMONIC
BIRTHPLACE.

WHERE HE
MADE HIS
DEAL.



No.

LEVEL NINE.

THE NIGHTMARISH
REALM THAT
VOMITED SPAWN
BACK TO LIFE.

WHOSE
RULER CRAVES
THAT WHICH
HE HIMSELF
WAS NOT
FURNISHED:
SOULS.

THEY ARE EITHER
GIVEN OVER AT DEATH
OR SURRENDERED
WILLINGLY BY THOSE
WHO REJECT GOD.
EACH SOUL HELPS TO
AMASS AN ARMY FIT
TO CONQUER THE
HEAVENS.

LORDING OVER IT ALL
IS THE DEVIL KNOWN
AS THE MALEBOLGIA.
HE WAITS OUT THE
SLOW CENTURIES UNTIL
THE BATTLE WITH GOD
IS DECLARED...

...UNTIL HIS
ARMY WILL
VANQUISH
THE LIGHT.

INTO EVERY
CORNER, THE
SHADOWS
WILL SEEP--

--DRIVING HOME
THE VICTORY
HIS GENERALS
HAVE WON.

AL SIMMONS
IS EXPECTED
TO ONE DAY
BECOME SUCH
A GENERAL...

... WHICH IS WHY SPAWN
IS NOW BEING PUT
THROUGH THE PACES.
MALEBOLGIA WISHES TO
SEE HIS POTENTIAL FIRST-
HAND...

... TO BEST GAUGE
WHETHER HE'LL
BE ABLE TO
GERMINATE THE
EVIL LIVING DEEP
WITHIN SIMMONS'
BEING.

UMPF

SO THERE
MUST BE
TESTS.

MIXED
WITH CRUEL
IRONY.

KINGAID!

you scream,
i scream,
we both scream
for ice cream

HE'D KILLED HIM
ONCE BEFORE,
SPAWN HAD. *

BUT THIS IS HELL.
THIS IS NOW.

LOGIC ISN'T ACCORDED
ANY FAVORS. INSTINC-
TIVELY, SPAWN KNOWS
THIS. MORE IMPOR-
TANTLY, HE ACCEPTS IT
WITHOUT QUESTION.

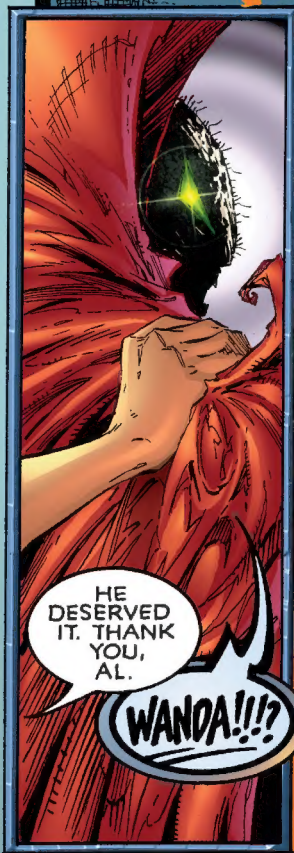
STRIPPING CHILDREN
OF THEIR INNOCENCE...
AND SOCIETY OF ITS
CHILDREN.

ON EARTH, BILLY
KINCAID HAD FALLEN
TO THE LOWEST
POSSIBLE LEVEL
KNOWN TO MAN: A
MURDERING
PEDOPHILE.

THE HELLSPAWN
DISEMBOWELS HIM A
SECOND TIME WHILE
WISHING THAT KINCAID
WILL TRY TO GET UP SO
HE CAN GUT HIM AGAIN.

AND SO,
SPAWN HAS
PASSED
THIS TEST.





HE
DESERVED
IT. THANK
YOU,
AL.

WANDA!!!?

I KNOW
WHAT YOU'RE
THINKING, BUT
IT REALLY
IS ME, SWEET-
HEART.

GOD,
HOW
CAN THIS
BE?!

BECAUSE I
WANTED IT. TO BE
BY YOUR SIDE... FOR-
EVER. I KNOW THAT
GOD SCORNS THOSE
WHO TAKE THEIR
OWN LIVES...

HE STARES IN
HER EYES.
THEY DON'T LIE.

HE CHERISHES THIS
ELUSIVE MOMENT
AS THEY EMBRACE.

THE WAIT HAS BEEN
SO VERY LONG.

I DIDN'T
MEAN FOR ANY
OF THIS TO
HAPPEN.

...BUT
SUICIDE
WAS THE
ONLY CHOICE.
WE HAVE
TO BE
TOGETHER.





I KNOW YOU DIDN'T, AL. BUT I'M HERE... WE'RE HERE. ALL OF US.

YOU WERE ALWAYS TOO MUCH MAN FOR ONE WOMAN.



NOW YOU CAN HAVE ME ANY WAY YOU WANT. FAITHFUL. LUSTFUL. ADORING.

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO END. WE CAN SATISFY ALL YOUR DESIRES.

IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT EMOTION YOU FEEL. WE... I CAN FULFILL YOU. 'TILL DEATH DO US PART.' REMEMBER THAT, OUR WEDDING VOW?

FOR ONE BRIEF, FROZEN MOMENT, AL SIMMONS BELIEVES HIS TORMENT IS FINALLY AT AN END. EUPHORIA REIGNS. HIS CURSE HAS BEEN LIFTED.

AS HE FALLS, IT STILL DOESN'T REGISTER. THIS IS A HOAX. A SHAM.

TEST

EXPLOITING THE WEAKNESS THAT FOREVER DAMNED HIM: HIS LOVE FOR HIS BEAUTIFUL WIFE.

SHE'S THE REASON HE NOW EXISTS, WHY HE HAD TO GO ON IN THIS NEW, WRETCHED FORM.



HE CLOSES HIS EYES AS SHE POUNCES...

HE WON'T LET THAT HAPPEN.

BUT NOW THEY'RE MOCKING HER AND WHAT SHE REPRESENTS.

...NOT WANTING TO WITNESS WHAT MUST NOW BE DONE.



IT'S NOT HER, HE KEEPS
TELLING HIMSELF.
IT'S NOT HER.

EVEN AS THE
SULPHURIC
AIR ECHOES
SICKENINGLY
WITH THE
SOUND OF
SNAPPING
BONES AND
CARTILAGE.


WHAT IS MOST
TORTUROUS IS
HEARING
WANDA'S SWEET
VOICE BEGGING
FOR MERCY.

HE CAN'T
BEAR IT.

LIKE SOME CRAZED,
PSYCHOTIC TARZAN HE
SCREAMS, DROWNING
OUT THE PITIABLE
PLEASE.

AS ONE OF THE
CHANGELINGS
BRUSHES AGAINST
HIM, SPAWN GETS A
SENSE OF THEIR
TRUE FORM.

HIS GREEN EYES PEEL
OPEN, SPILLING
FORTH RAGING
ENERGY.



THEN, A
SINGLE WORD
IS WHISPERED.

ENOUGH.



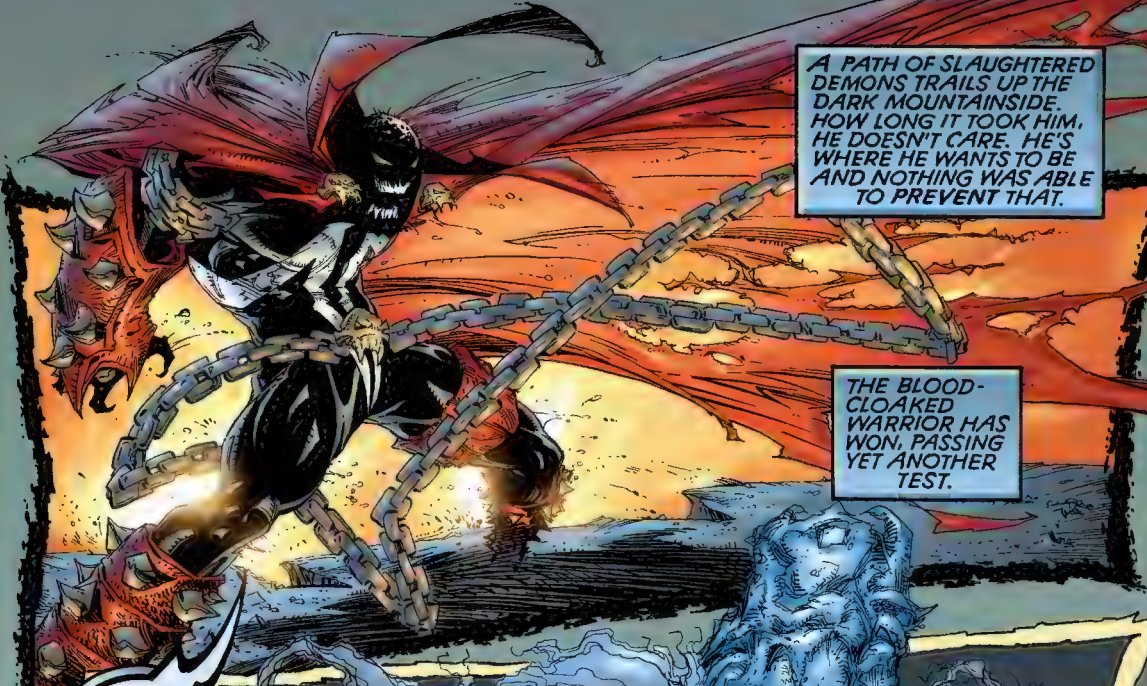
GODDAMMIT,
I'VE SUFFERED
ENOUGH!

MALEBOLGA
WANTS A WAR.
HE'S GOT IT!
I DON'T GIVE
A CRAP
ANYMORE

SEND YOUR
PUPPETS: EVERY
LAST ONE OF
THEM. I'LL
TAKE 'EM.

YOU WANT ME TO
BE LIKE YOU. FINE.
I'LL BE VICIOUS,
EVIL, SOULLESS!!
AFTER I'VE RIPPED
YOUR THROAT OUT.

YOU
BASTARD
THIS IS
GOING
TO END



A PATH OF SLAUGHTERED
DEMONS TRAILS UP THE
DARK MOUNTAIN SIDE.
HOW LONG IT TOOK HIM,
HE DOESN'T CARE. HE'S
WHERE HE WANTS TO BE
AND NOTHING WAS ABLE
TO PREVENT THAT.

THE BLOOD-
CLOAKED
WARRIOR HAS
WON, PASSING
YET ANOTHER
TEST.

NOW
IT'S YOUR
TURN,
DEVIL!


CREATION MEETS
CREATOR. THIS
OFFICIALLY SETS
THE SCENE.

Contain your
petty threats, Simmons.
Ignorance does not befit
your station. You see,
my child, I know you were
impressed by that little
skirmish, but you grasp
only a fraction of
the truth about
yourself.

I
DON'T
CARE!

Then do
something
about it.

BELIEVE
ME, I
INTEND
TO.



'CAUSE YOU
DON'T SCARE ME.
KNOW WHY? THERE'S
NOTHING LEFT FOR YOU
TO TAKE. I'M EMPTY.
DRAINED.

BUT I'LL NEVER
BE YOUR SLAVE.

NEVER!

SUDDENLY,
THE GROUND
SHIFTS--

--AS A SICKLY
CACKLE
REVERBERATES
THROUGH THE
CORRIDORS
OF HELL.

HA HA HA HA

Don't
delude your-
self, humans.
It's far too late
for you to attain
inner peace.

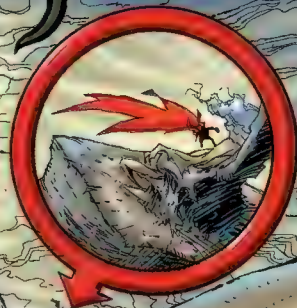
You don't even know what you're fighting against, do you? How can you even hope to slay me when I'm not there?

I'm here.

Or am I?

You're off-balance. Simoes, exactly what I want you to be questioning your own sanity. What's this all about?

Well, let me enlighten you.




Just like the version of Hell that surrounds you.

Machines like you are very rare... built with just the right wiring. You could have been an instrument of God's will. Instead, you pined yourself.

...allowing others to trigger your anger. Manipulate your logic.

Just like I did. It's not about good or evil. Those are concepts created by man. Very limited.





It appears
as your
superstitious
beliefs it should
you humans have
such narrow
imagination.

Our Evil
Terror
Threats
many forms so
do their masters

Shadows
were created
in hell. Their
tentacles reach
on gods' earth,
and creep through
to earth.

How can
you possibly
kill that which
is everywhere
at once?

I live
in all you
see. In all
shapes.

From
the lowly
insects

To the
beasts

And to
the place
that reaches
me now in all
the heart
of man



That's how I got you.
Because you didn't want
me. Needing me. For that
you've always had always
been your choice.

You became a
good and kinder
willingly, and I
watched as you grew
more and more
efficient at it.

THEN TAKE
ME, MY SOUL,
WHATEVER THE HELL
YOU WANT--

-- JUST
LEAVE MY
WIFE ALONE.
SHE'S NOT A
PART OF
THIS.


Unfortunately,
she is.

And as for
your love, it's
already mine. So
you've nothing
left to barter.

Yes, I
do.

MY LOYALTY.

YOU DON'T
CONTROL THAT.
I'VE TAKEN YOUR
POWERS, YOUR
COSTUME, AND
WHATEVER IT IS I'VE
BECOME. BUT YOU
STILL DON'T
CONTROL ME.



YOU JUST OWN ME. THAT'S ALL. MY MIND'S STILL FREE, AND I REJECT ALL OF THIS. YOU'VE FAILED, MALEBOLGIA.

GOD'S LAUGHING AT YOU.

Listen here, worm! You're nothing! You were *born* because I wanted it. Because I let you come back.

So fine. Convince your self that you're free. You what? You're *not* free. Because believe me, I do control you.

Your emotions are mine. They're what Jason Wyke manipulated. He ordered you to commit atrocities. You gave in.

If anyone should be laughing, it's me, *man*. In God's face. He put His grip on one of the potential elite. And he says you and he *will* face each other as enemies.

That
will lead
to my
victory.

You are
becoming
exactly what I
intended. Your
rage, instincts,
they're perfect. Your
hallucinated rejection
of these circumstances,
all part of the process.
To become my
Grim Reaper.
My messenger.

I've even
given you
a few more
tools.*

The Visage
of Death.

The Black
Habit of
Death.

And the Mark.



Slowly,
I've made
you over, in
my image--

-- transforming
you into one of my
greatest warriors. So,
where there was failure
we now find grandeur.
Death now takes relentless
strides. Return, my
Hellspawn, to your
beginnings.

The Earth needs
you-- for, without
an agent of Death,
souls cannot be
harvested.

And my
army must
grow.

As with your loyalty,
I need your servitude.
In time, that will come.

Let that time be now.

Be my executor.
Work for me and I
promise to leave your
wife untouched.

Pure.



"Now go. Stimulate corruption in your wake. Enter the minds of men. Disrupt their dreams and spread my gospel."

EARTH.
2:54 A.M.

TERRY.
I'M
HERE.

WHO
ARE YOU?
TELL
ME!

YOU
ALREADY
KNOW.



WHAT
DO YOU
MEAN?

LOOK
AT ME.
INTO MY
EYES.



WHAT
DO YOU
SEE?

"A
DARKNESS
OF SOME
KIND."

NO!

YOU SEE
ME, YOUR
FRIEND.

LOOK
AGAIN.

"MY GOD.
IT'S
TRUE."



YOU'RE
BACK!
ALIVE!

AL!



...YOU'RE
ALIVE...

TERRY FITZGERALD
WILL SIT THERE,
SHAKING, UNTIL THE
SHADOWS WITHDRAW
FROM DAWN'S LIGHT.





Tyrant
Lizard
King

EMPIRE